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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether teaching a specific reading strategy could improve the reading comprehension and memory of young (18 to 32) and older (62 and older) high school educated adults with average to high vocabulary test scores. The "plan strategy" was identified through an examination of what more than 1,000 adults wrote down as they read and recalled magazine articles, which showed that successful readers of all ages appeared to search out and follow a text's subordinate relational structure and to focus on its message and its relationship to supporting major details. The subjects were stratified on vocabulary scores and randomly assigned to three groups, who (1) learned about five basic top-level structures (writing plans) used by authors to organize ideas and how to apply them to their reading, (2) practiced reading and remembering information, or (3) received no instruction. Results of pretesting and posttesting on recall and comprehension indicated that subjects in the strategy group learned to employ the plan strategy and to answer main idea questions correctly. They shifted in the types of information considered important and claimed improved reading strategies, superior memory for their reading, and increased interest in and enjoyment of reading. Both older and younger readers in the strategy group improved equivalently and maintained their improvement over time. (The paper contains descriptions of the five basic writing plans and signals that cue readers to them, a description of a young adult's performance and change in recall of problem/solution texts on pretest to posttest, a reading plan schematic, and copies of reading materials used in the study.) (FL)

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TRAINING USE OF TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURE IN EXPOSITORY TEXT: INCREASES IN READING COMPREHENSION OF YOUNG AND OLD ADULTS.

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abstract

Five instructional sessions directly applied research on text structure with the goal of improving the reading comprehension and memory of young and old adults. Subjects were randomly assigned to three groups: (1) the structure strategy instruction, (2) instruction centered on practice with the same reading materials without the strategy, and (3) no instruction. All groups improved their recall from the pretest to posttests. However, young and old adults in the strategy group showed subtantially more improvement. Young and old adults in the strategy group increased their ability to use the strategy and to correctly answer main idea questions. They shifted in the types of information considered important and claimed improved reading strategies, superior memory for their reading in the laboratory and everyday life, and increased interest in and enjoyment of reading. Old and young adults improved equivalently from this instruction and maintained their improvement over time.

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TRAINING USE OF TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURE IN EXPOSITORY TEXT: INCREASES IN READING COMPREHENSION OF YOUNG AND OLD ADULTS.

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This report describes a study funded by the National Institute of Aging (grant 03438) to examine the effectiveness of a reading strategy for improving the reading comprehension and memory of young and old adults. The reading strategy examined is called the plan strategy and teaches readers to utilize the writing plans or top-level structures in texts to facilitate encoding and retrieval. We identified this strategy by examining what over 1000 adults wrote down when they read and recalled short magazine articles. Successful readers at all ages appear to search out and follow the text's superordinate relational structure and focus on the text's message and how it relates to supporting major details. They approach text with knowledge about how texts are conventionally organized and a strategy to seek and use the top-level structure in a particular text as an organizational framework to facilitate encoding and retrieval.

Generally, older adults (62 and older) do not remember as much as young adults (18-32) from their reading. Two theories exist to explain this poorer performance of older adults. One states that older people remember less because of irreversible

cell loss and less efficient cell functioning in the central nervous system with increasing age. In contrast, the other model focuses on experience. One version of the experiential model explains that older people remember less because in their everyday life they are not practicing reading and remembering information as much as younger people, who are involved in school or job related reading and remembering. The other version states that a specific type of practice is missing for older adults; that is, practice with an efficient prose learning strategy. Older adults deficient in remembering what they read either did not learn such effective strategies in school decades ago or fail to use them now due to lack of use.

Our past studies with about 600 young, middle-age, and older adults showed us a subgroup of older adults that remember about as much as young adults. This subgroup of older adults had important characteristics in common; they were frequent readers, had acquired at least one college degree, attained high scores on vocabulary tests, and could use the top-level structure in reading materials to guide their learning and memory.

This research posed the question: Can instruction aimed at teaching the plan strategy improve the reading comprehension of high school educated older adults with average to high average vocabulary scores? Adults with these characteritics have been shown to exhibit large age deficits in using the top-level structure of texts and signals in text that cue readers to this organization (eg. "in contrast," "as a result"). The intervention program directly taught these skills in which these

older adults are deficient.

For the current study we screened out adults who were using the strategy on the pretest. Thus, the instruction was aimed at adults who were not using the reading strategy and as a result could most benefit from the instruction. Eliminated from the sample were 12% of the older adults and 33% of the younger adults who exhibited consistent use of the strategy on four recalls written prior to instruction.

Young and old adults were stratified on vocabulary scores and then randomly assigned to three groups. One group learned about five basic top-level structures or writing plans used by authors to organize their ideas. They learned to recognize these structures in everyday reading materials and use these structures as a framework for learning. Then, they learned to use these structures to systematically search their memory for what they learned from an article. Another group simply practiced reading and remembering information from their reading. They started with short materials and worked up to longer ones. They read the same materials as the people in the strategy group. Both the strategy and practice groups meet for one and a half hours a day for five days spread over two weeks. The final group received no instruction. All participants were tested a day prior to instruction, two days after the completion of the instruction, and two weeks after the instruction. During the testing sessions the subjects read and recalled four passages, recalled one of these passages again after a delay, took a standardized reading comprehension test, underlined the most important ideas in passages, answered main idea, detail, and

problem solving questions about texts, and filled out questionnaires about reading strategies and attitudes.

The remainder to this report will describe briefly the training materials and basic findings from their evaluation. A complete copy of the training materials and a detailed account of their evaluation will be available in a book to be published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Training Materials

Instruction with the plan strategy taught the learners to employ a deliberate plan or strategy for remembering what they read; this strategy is depicted graphically in Figure 1. In reading, they were taught to choose the organizational plan used by the writer to organize his or her ideas. In remembering, they were taught to use the same organizational plan.

On the first day the rationale, power, and limitations of the strategy were discussed. They learned about five basic plans for organizing expository text. These plans were description, sequence, causation, problem/solution, and comparison and are summarized in Table 1.

In the training program each plan was discussed in detail and examples were given using the main captions of advertisements found in magazines. Advertisements were used the first day because they are fimliar, fun to use, and often clearly depict these writing plans. For example, look at Figures 2 and 3 and see if you can match them with any plans listed in Table 1. The best choice for both is the comparison plan; it organizes on the basis of similarities and differences. With the comparison plan an author

may equally recommend the compared views or she may favor one view over another. Political speeches are often of the comparison type, particularly where one view is clearly favored over the other.

HEAVY DUTY REYNOLDS WRAP GIVES YOU 2 JUICY OPTIONS. JUICY AND WRAPPED. JUICY AND TENTED.

In this advertisement alternative ways to prepare turkey with Reynolds Wrap are presented. The options are equally desirable from the author's viewpoint. The word option in this advertisement helps to signal us that a comparison plan is being used.

MOST WRAPS JUST WRAP. REYNOLDS WRAP WRAPS, MOLDS AND SEALS TIGHTLY.

In contrast, in this advertisement one product is contrasted to others and favored as superior. The word "just" in this advertisement cues us into the comparison plan with one product favored over another. Usually this form of comparison is more prevalent with advertisements because the advertisers want to convince you that their product is superior so that you will buy it.

The participants were told that many texts will reflect more than one of these basic five plans. Examples from television programs, newspapers, and stories were used to point out to the students that the strategy involves finding the overall plan used in the text rather than plans used to organize details in a text. The concept of signaling words was introduced and then the students worked in pairs of partners for the remainder of session 1. First, they examined five advertisements to determine the overall plans. Next the partners wrote advertisements in two specified plans to sell their new invention, the safety pin.

Finally, they wrote about Figure 4 with the other plans. Feedback was given for their performance on these tasks.

Session 2 focused on teaching other signaling words for each plan and the idea that listing can occur with any of the five plans. The students carefully read and quizzed their partner about Table 1. This table was used at all subsequent training sessions and in their home reading; additional signaling words discovered were added to the table. In this session they identified the plan and signaling for short magazine entries. Figure 5 shows one of the more difficult selections. After discussing their answers with their partners, the class discussed them with diagrams of the overall plan and its major structures; an example is provided in Figure 5.

The remainder of the session was spent reading and sorting 17 passages into the five plans and reading and recalling two passages. In session 1 and 2 the five plans were taught, but no instruction was given in how to use the structure of these plans to facilitate encoding and retrieval of information in texts. In session 1 most of the young people caught on quite quickly to the five plans, but most of the older people appeared strained and a bit confused. In the second session many of the older people began to understand and enjoy this new way of thinking about reading. During session three nearly all the older people were understanding and attempting to use the strategy. Evaluation materials collected after session 2 showed that just teaching people the definitions and signals for the plans was not sufficient for their use of these plans to organize their recall

of the text. The third session where using the strategy to aid recall was modeled was critical for the subjects' to master the strategy.

In session 3 the rationale for using the plans in text to increase memory was emphasized. They were told to ask two questions before reading a passage: What is the plan for this passage? What is the main idea that fits this plan? In addition, specific steps for recall were given and a young and old adult modeled reading and recall texts from each of the five basic organizational types.

Next, the students read and recalled two passages getting feedback on their progress in using the strategy after each passage was recalled. A key phrase in the program was CHOOSE IT, USE IT, OR LOSE IT.

In session 4 students received a detailed report of their strengths and areas to work on to master the strategy. For this session and the final session partners were assigned by pairing a proficient student with a less proficient student. In addition, instruction and practice were given in applying the strategy to longer passages and muddled passages.

In the fifth session another detailed report of their progress was given to each student. The session was spent eliminating any difficulties and giving the students practice in using the strategy. In session 3, 4, and 5 the mnemonic aspects of each particular plan was stressed. For example for the comparison plan it was repeatedly pointed out that opposing views often are compared on many of the same issues; such as, one political candidates views on abortion, taxes, government

spending, and defense, and then the other candidiates views on these same issues. They discovered that their memory will be improved it they remember that a comparison plan was used and the number and name of the issues compared; for the example one should remember that the candidates were compared on four issues: abortion, taxes, government spending and defense. In recalling a passage they were instructed to check to see if they had mentioned each issue from the two perspectives. Remembering one issue for one compared view can often jog their memory for the opposite position's view of the issue.

Did Training Increase Use of the Plan Strategy?

Instruction with the plan strategy did significantly and dramatically increase use of this strategy by both young and old adults deficient in the use of the strategy prior to instruction. Some evidence for this improvement is shown in Table 2 for the texts organized with problem/solution structures. As can be seen in the table, on the first posttest most (93%) of the old and young adults in the strategy group used the problem/solution structure to organize their recalls, while most of the old and young adults in the other groups did not (chi-square = 38.27, d.f. = 5, $p < .001$). This superiority in use of the top-level structure was maintained by both the old and young adults in the strategy group when these passages were recalled two weeks later. Also, on the passages read two weeks after instruction 87% of the adults in the strategy group used the problem/solution structure, while 83% of the adults in the other two groups did not. Consistent findings also were found for other structures and on

other tasks, such as sorting passages and asking questions about the organization of texts and changes in each reader's strategies. Old adults appeared to be able to acquire this skill after five lessons as well as the young adults on all tasks, but the sorting task where young adults in the strategy group could correctly sort more passage (82%), than the old adults in this group (71%).

Did Training Increase the Amount of Information Remembered?

Figure 6 presents the recall data averaged over the three sets of passages (problem/solution, comparison, and culturally salient comparison). The primary findings of interest held over the three sets of passages. In Figure 7 these same findings are depicted with gain scores (average posttest performance - pretest performance). These recall data show that the three groups significantly improved their performance on recall tests over the duration of the instruction. Thus, practice alone on the tasks improved performance. However, young and old adults in the strategy group improved significantly more than those in the other groups on free recall of information in texts. These findings also held on performance answering main idea questions as seen in Figure 8. Questionnaire data and other tasks indicated that training with the strategy focused the learners attention away from details and toward the main ideas in texts.

Did Training Effect Other Measures of Reading Competency or Enjoyment?

Although we expected the training to influence use of the strategy and free recall, we also administered measures to test for unexpected outcomes of the training. These measures included

performance on a standardized reading comprehension test, parts of another reading test, recognition of topics read, ability to answer thought questions, and a questionnaire about interest and enjoyment of reading. The only measures showing statistically significant gains for the strategy group were the measures of interest and enjoyment of reading.

In summary, young and old adults in the strategy group increased their ability to use the strategy, to recall text, and to correctly answer main idea questions. They shifted in the types of information considered important and claimed improved reading strategies, superior memory for their reading in the laboratory and everyday life, and increased interest in and enjoyment of reading. Old and young adults improved equivalently from this instruction and maintained their improvement over time.

Two Case Studies.

Briefly we will examine the progress of one young adult and one old adult from the strategy group. First, we will look at the progress of the young adult who we will call May. On the pretest May did not use problem/solution nor comparison top-level structures to organize her any of her four recalls; however, she could use the easier descriptive top-level structure on the practice passage. On the pretest she recalled an average of 10% of the idea units from the passages and answered 38% of the questions correctly. On the first posttest May used the top-level structures of the texts in all of her recalls, recalled an average of 27% of the idea units, and answered 75% of the questions correctly. Two weeks after instruction May again used

the top-level structure for all recalls, recalled 23% of the idea units, and answered 100% of the questions correctly. On the passage sorting tasks two weeks after instruction, May correctly sorted into the five basic plans 17 out of 17 selections taken from magazines, newspapers, and the Bible. The amount of information she could remember more than doubled on the free recall task. This increase in the amount of information remembered from texts also showed comparable increases on questions answered. The improvement was maintained at the delayed testing session two weeks after completion of instruction. In addition, a 6% increase in percentile rank on the Metropolitan Reading Test was found in comparing her pretest and posttest performance.

We will examine changes in May's performance on the problem/solution passages. On the pretest she read the reactor passage; in this passage problems (the need to generate electrical power, the need to clean up pollution, and finite reserves) were discussed and fast breeder reactors presented as the solution and then described. May's recall simply lists some ideas from the passage and misses the plan as can be seen in Table 3.

The same changes in her approach to reading and remembering texts can be seen by looking at her recall of both sets of comparison passages. By the end of the instruction May became very proficient at using the plan strategy and recalled 68% of the idea units from the comparison passage on the topic of railroads.

In summary, May mastered this strategy for utilizing the

structure in text and showed dramatic increases in her memory of what she read. By the end of the third session May appeared to have acquired that strategy; in the last two sessions she refined it using it with less signaling and more muddled texts. When asked which plans were hardest and easiest for her, she explained that they were all easy and that once you catch on you can see the signaling words. In evaluating changes in reading over the program, May said the following: "I feel I remember more and think more about what I'm reading." "I try to figure out the plan and the main idea sentence in the testing sessions and in everyday reading." "I like reading more than before the sessions and I read more magazines."

Next we will look briefly at the performance of an older adult in the strategy group who we will call her Lela. Like the young adult, simply learning the definitions of the plans was not sufficient. The last three sessions were necessary to model and practice how to use the plan to search memory and write about or tell what was remembered. By the beginning of the fourth session Lela had mastered description and sequence, but still needed work on causation, problem/solution, and comparison. By the end of that session she had also mastered causation and problem/solution, but still needed to work on comparison. By the end of the final session she showed mastery of all five plans. After instruction she sorted 12 out of 17 passages correctly into the five plans. On the pretest she used the plan strategy on none of the problem/solution or comparison text, but could use it on the descriptive practice text; on the two posttests she used

the plan on all of the texts. Her performance on the Metropolitan Reading Test went up 2 percent after the instruction. Lela's recall and response to questions improved. For example, her recall on the pretest of the comparison text completely missed the comparison and yielded recall of 16% of the idea units, while posttest recall employing the strategy was up to 59%.

Lela reported that her memory was much better after the program and that she was enjoying reading more and looking for problem/solutions in everything she reads. In addition, she stated, "I believe that this memory improvement program is very valuable to the older person. It makes you more aware of details of what you are reading. Your recall is stimulated by using the methods given in this program. I feel that a little longer period or more classes would have been helpful." When the program was offerred to the control group after the conclusion of the experiment, Lela volunteered to go through the program a second time.

Table 1

Five Basic Writing Plans and
Signals that Cue Readers to these Plans

Writing Plan & Definition	Signals
Description Descriptive ideas that give attributes, specifics, or setting information about a topic. The main idea is that attributes of a topic are discussed. eg. newspaper article describing who, where, when and how.	for example, which was one, this particular, for instance, specifically, such as, attributes of, that is, namely, properties of, characteristics are, qualities are, marks of, in describing, _____
Sequence Ideas grouped on the basis of order or time. The main idea is the procedure or history related. eg. recipe procedures, history of Civil War battles, growth from birth to 12 months	afterwards, later, finally, last, early, following, to begin with, to start with, then, as time passed, continuing on, to end, years ago, in the first place, before, after, soon, more recently, _____
Causation Presents causal or cause and effect-like relations between ideas. The main is organized into cause and effect parts. eg. directions: if you want to take good pictures, then you must ...; explanations: the idea explained is the effect and the explanation is its cause.	as a result, because, since, for the purpose of, caused, led to, consequence, thus, in order to , this is why, if/then, the reason, so, in explanation, therefore, _____

(Table 1 continued)

Problem/solution

The main ideas are organized into two parts: a problem part and a solution part that responds to the problem by trying to eliminate it, or a question part and an answer part that responds to the question by trying to answer it. eg. scientific articles often first raise a question or problem and then seek to give an answer or solution.	problem: problem, question, puzzle, perplexity, enigma, riddle, issue, query, need to prevent, the trouble, _____ _____ _____ solution: solution, answer, response, reply, rejoinder, return, comeback, to satisfy the problem, to set the issue at rest, to solve these problems, _____ _____ _____ _____

Comparison

Relates ideas on the basis of differences and similarities. The main idea is organized in parts that provide a comparison, contrast, or alternative perspective on a topic. eg. political speeches, particularly where one view is clearly favored over the other.	not everyone, but, in contrast, all but, instead, act like, however, in comparison, on the other hand, whereas, in opposition, unlike, alike, have in common, share, resemble, the same as, different, difference, differentiate, compared to, while, although, _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Listing can occur with any of the five writing plans. Listing simply groups ideas together. Passages are often organized as a listing of descriptions about a topic. A sequence always contains a listing of ideas, but the ideas are ordered sequentially. A listing can occur when groups of causes are presented, groups of effects are listed, groups of solutions are posited, groups of ideas are contrasted to another idea, and so forth.	common signals include: and, in addition, also, include, moreover, besides, first, second, third, etc., subsequent, furthermore, at the same time, another, and so forth,_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Table 2

Use of the problem/solution top-level structure in the reactor/schizophrenia/trusts passages by old and young adults in the Strategy, Practice, and Control Groups on the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttests.

PRETEST

Use top-level structure	Strategy		Practice		Control	
	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young
Yes	0	0	1	0	3	0
No	21	10	12	6	15	12

POSTTEST 1

Use top-level structure	Strategy		Practice		Control	
	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young
Yes	18	10	1	2	4	6
No	2	0	12	4	14	6

TWO WEEK DELAYED RECALL OF TESTS READ ON POSTTEST 1

Use top-level structure	Strategy		Practice		Control	
	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young
Yes	10	7	0	1	5	4
No	10	2	10	5	8	7

POSTTEST 2

Use top-level structure	Strategy		Practice		Control	
	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young
Yes	18	8	3	1	3	1
No	3	1	9	4	15	11

Table 3

DESCRIPTION OF A YOUNG ADULT IN THE STRATEGY GROUP AND CHANGES IN HER RECALL OF PROBLEM/SOLUTION TEXTS ON THE PRETEST TO POSTTEST

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBJECT:

Age	Vocabulary Quick	Vocabulary WAIS raw	Vocabulary WAIS scaled	Education	Metropolitan Advanced 2 % Rank (grade 12)	Survey Reading Instructional Reading Level
22	38%	42	10	13 years	48	11+

PRETEST:

"Breeder reactors are the fast growing idea of how to carry feul. It was talking about how important gas is becoming because we are getting low on it."

POSTTEST:

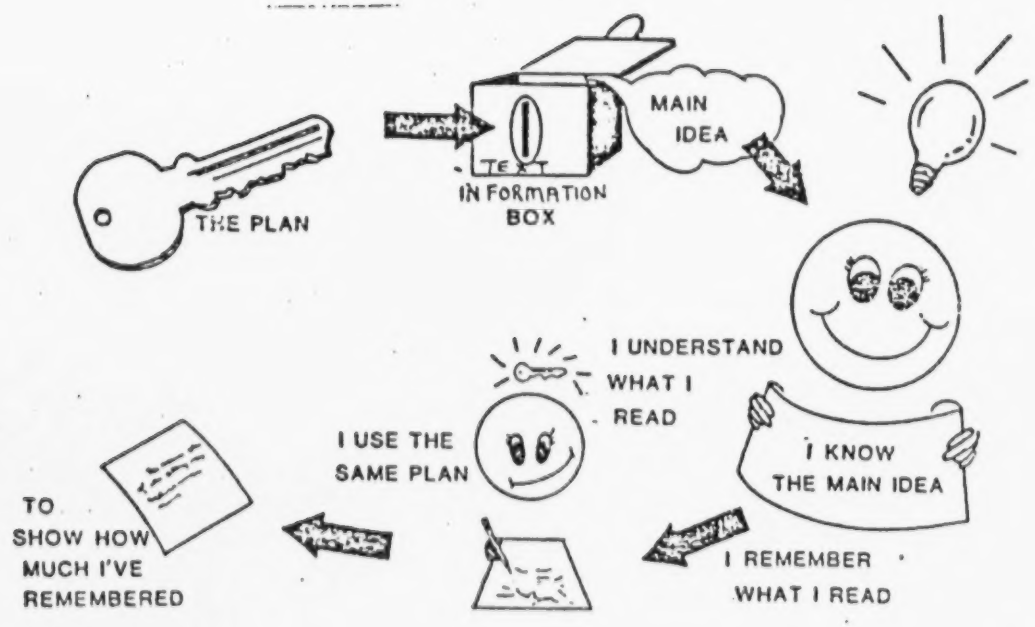
"There has been a problem about how to divide the money up when a person dies without having a will.

If you go to probate court to try to settle it. It might take up to 6 years to get your money plus all the court costs.

A solution to this problem is to make a trust. This is a substitute for a will. It avoids going to court. Trusts can never die. The trustor can divide up his money the way he wants and it will stay that way unless he changes his mind."

Figure 1

A Plan for READING



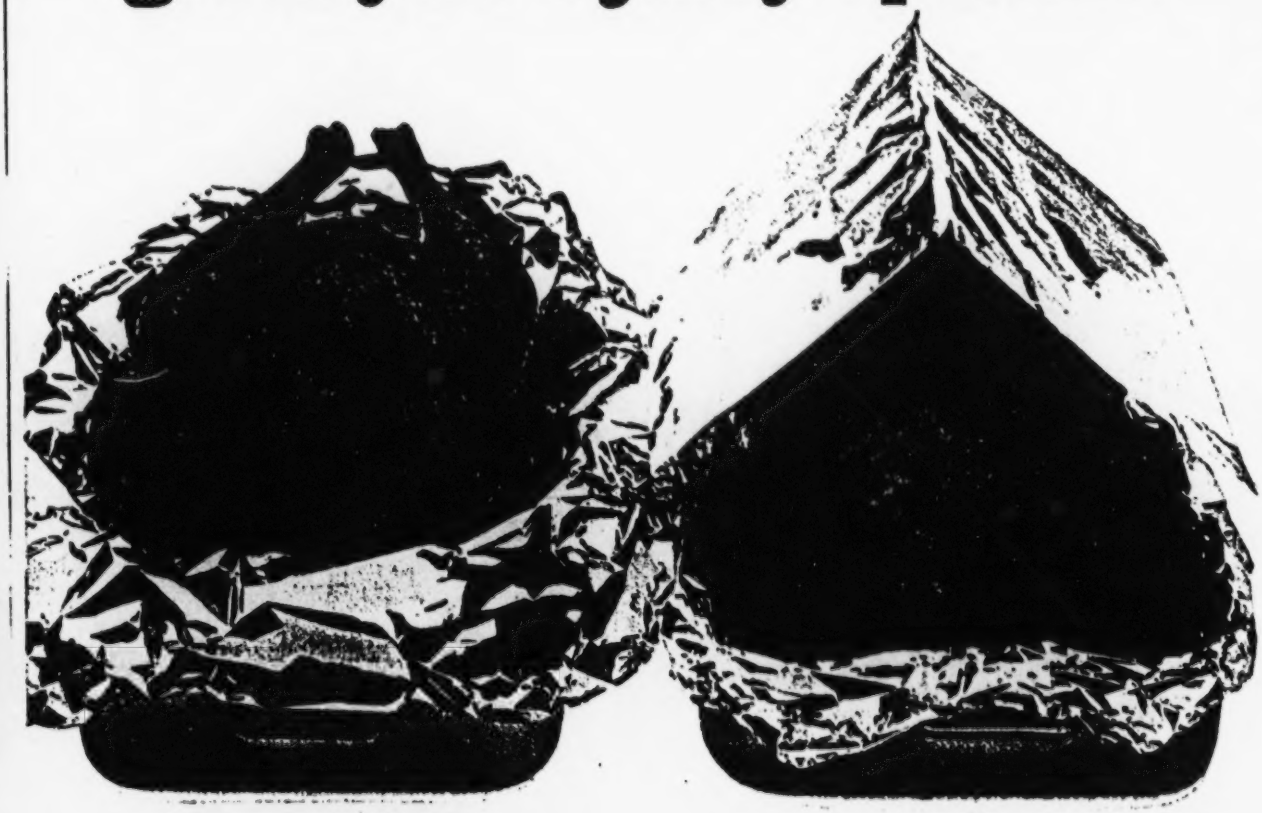
Do these things -

(1) Find the plan when you read a text.

(2) Use the same plan to tell what you can remember.

Figure 2

Heavy Duty Reynolds Wrap® gives you 2 juicy options.



Juicy and Wrapped

You just wrap bird completely in Heavy Duty Reynolds Wrap and roast. When turkey is almost done, turn back foil to brown the bird. This method roasts turkey evenly, keeps in juices and flavor, reduces oven spattering.

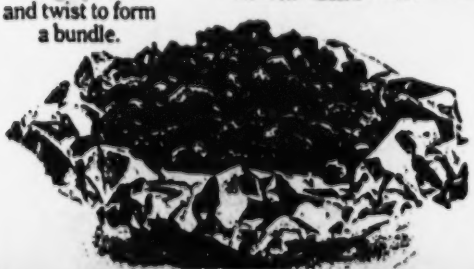
Many women say this is the best way to roast a turkey to perfection. And they're right.

Juicy and Tented

To start, line roasting pan with Heavy Duty Reynolds Wrap. Then take a sheet of Heavy Duty Reynolds Wrap and "tent" it over lightly browned bird and roast. This method roasts turkey evenly, keeps in juices and flavor, reduces oven spattering.

Many women say this is the best way to roast a turkey to perfection. And they're right.

Bake your dressing separately during the last hour of roasting. Just place dressing in sheet of Heavy Duty Reynolds Wrap, bring up ends and twist to form a bundle.



What wrap can you use to... line a pan, cook in, store leftovers in, then cook in again? Reynolds Wrap? You're right.

Complete turkey roasting instructions on box, or write for turkey recipe booklet, "All About Turkey," to Reynolds Metals Co., A.D.C., P.O. Box 27003, Richmond, Va. 23261.

Reynolds Wrap Aluminum Foil 37½ sq. ft.

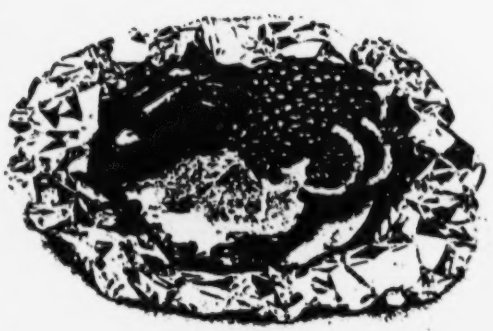
The Best Wrap Around.

Most wraps just wrap.
Reynolds Wrap wraps, molds and seals tightly.

Figure 3

A word to the food wise. Protection. You get it with Reynolds Wrap. It molds to leftovers the way most other wraps don't. And Reynolds Wrap seals tightly, too. Protects food against air and odors, helps leftovers stay good-tasting longer.

When you cover food in a bowl, you want that food to stay covered. Reynolds Wrap seals and covers tightly, protects best. Most other wraps have to be over-wrapped or they might loosen.



You can cook in Reynolds Wrap, reheat leftovers in it, too. And Reynolds Wrap is easier to use. You know that if you've ever tangled with most other wraps.

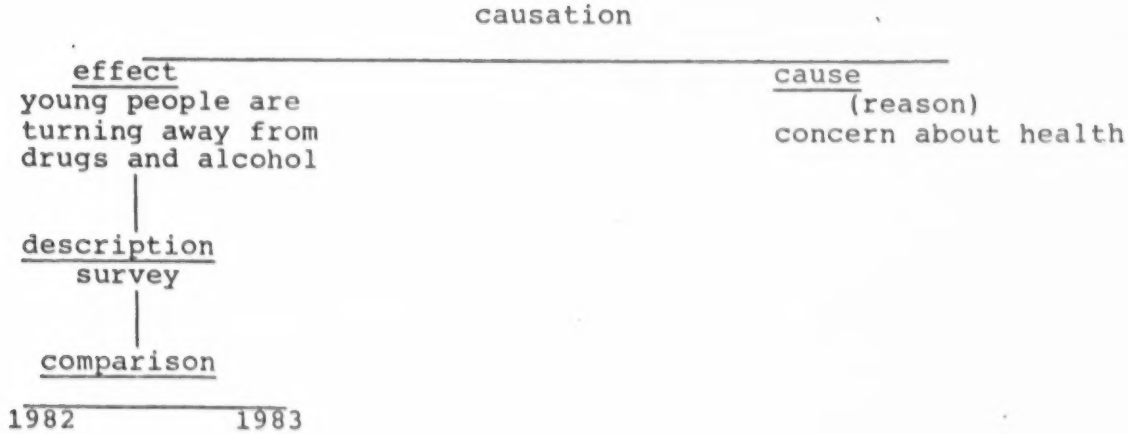
The Best Wrap Around.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Sample of materials used in session 2 to teach how to find the overall plan for an article.

STRUCTURE OF PLAN



TEXT: Youths Turn Off on Drugs. (Taken from U.S. News & World Report, February 20, 1984, p. 18. - permission granted 6/4/85)

Back at the schoolyard, the young people are turning away from drugs and alcohol. A new survey fro the National Institute on Drug Abuse says that the percentage of high school seniors using marijuana 20 or more times a month dropped to 5.5 percent last year, from 6.3 in 1982. The survey found that daily alcohol use also dipped in 1983 -- to 5.5 percent, from 5.7 percent in 1982. One big reason for the shift to clean living: Concern about health.

_____Plan

Figure 6

FREE RECALL SCORES (CENTERED SCORES) PRODUCED BY OLD AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE STRATEGY, PRACTICE, AND CONTROL SUMMED OVER THREE SETS OF PASSAGE ON THE PRE-TEST, POSTTEST 1 (TWO DAYS AFTER INSTRUCTION) AND POSTTEST 2 (TWO WEEKS AFTER INSTRUCTION).

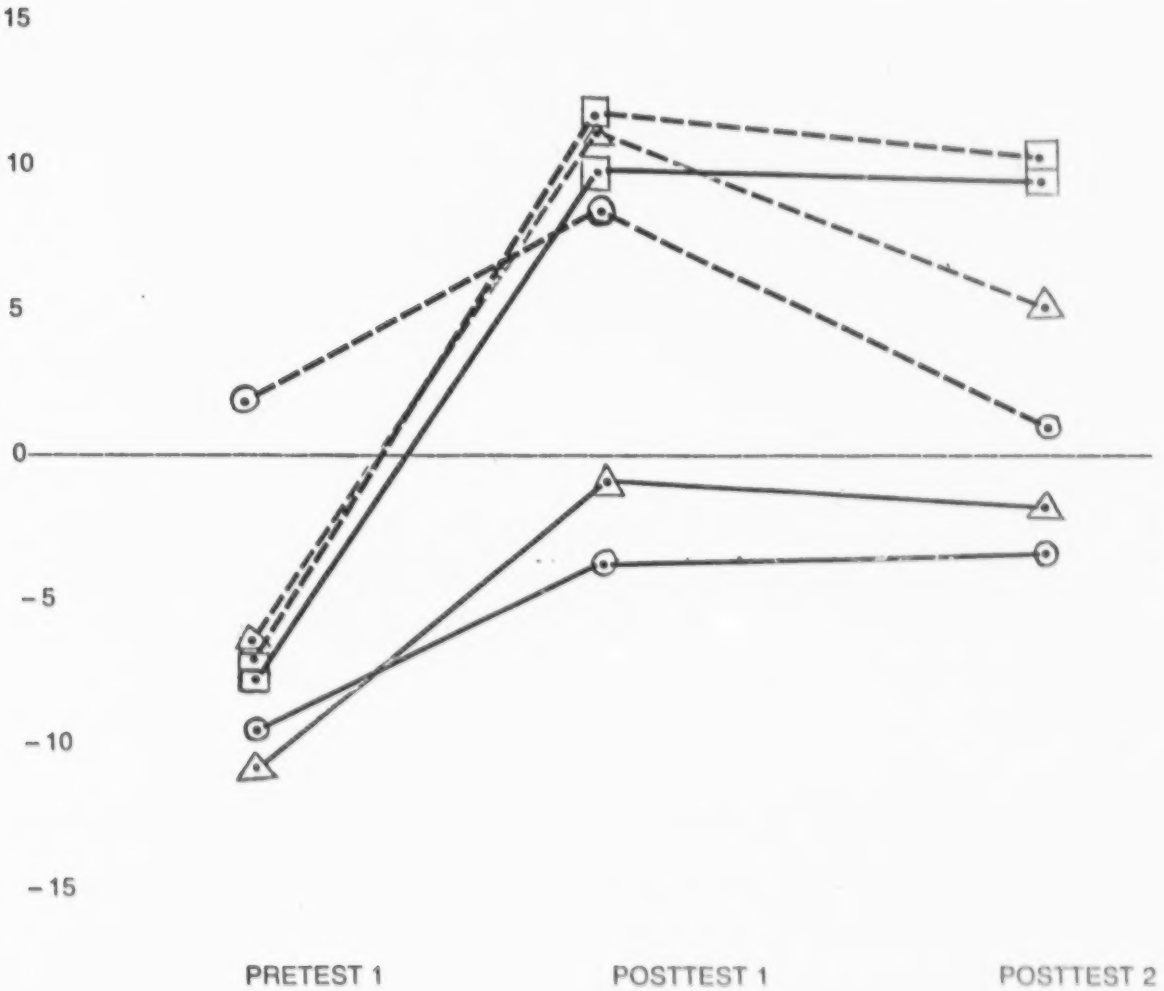


Figure 7

GAIN SCORES ACHIEVED BY OLD AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE STRATEGY, PRACTICE, AND CONTROL GROUPS SUMMED OVER THE THREE SETS OF PASSAGES.

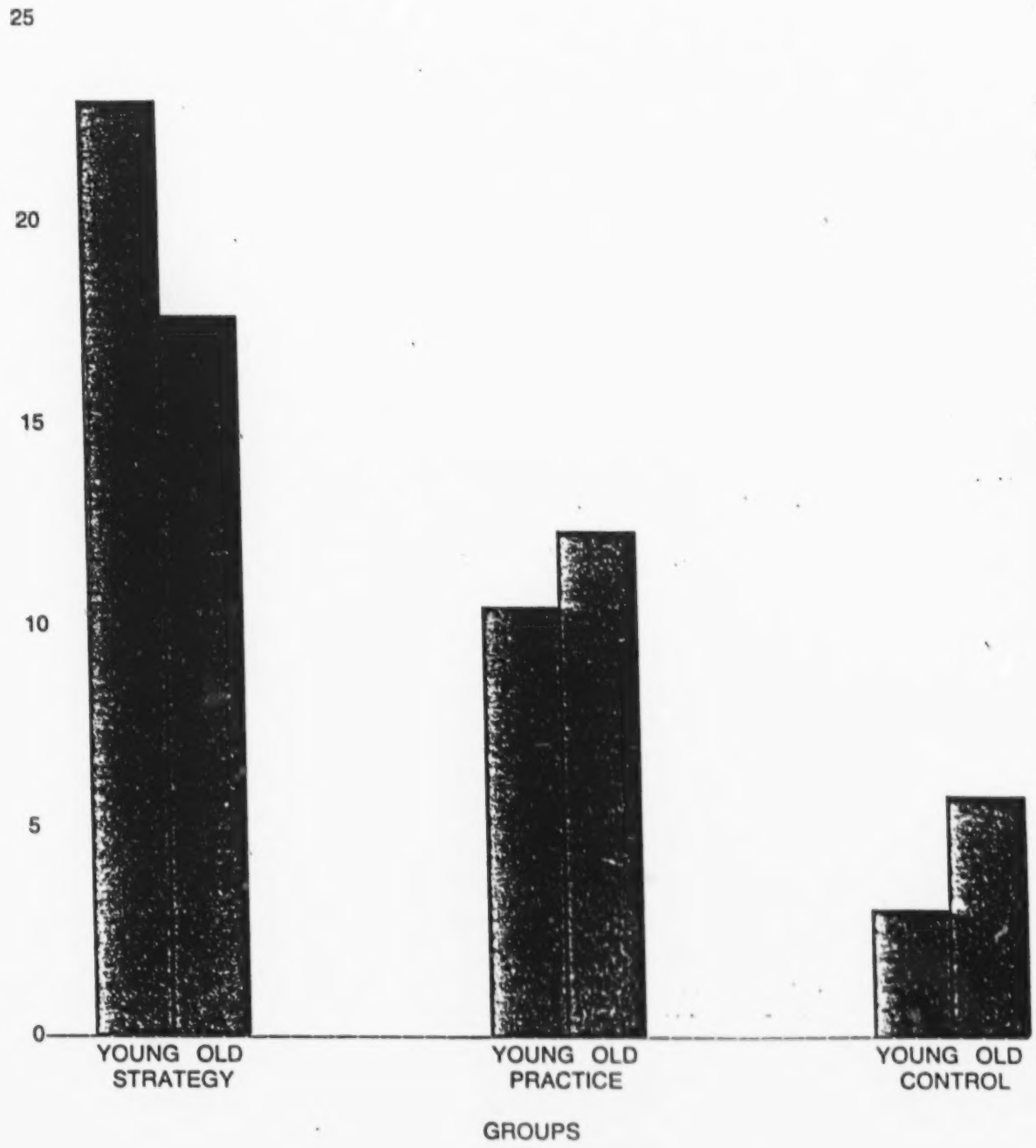


Figure 8

QUESTIONS CORRECTLY ANSWERED (CENTERED SCORES) BY OLD AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE STRATEGY, PRACTICE, AND CONTROL GROUPS AFTER READING THE PROBLEM/SOLUTION PASSAGES AT THE THREE TESTING TIMES.